

NEWS

Cancer patient says she was humiliated by the DMV

By Tamar Lapin

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Jennifer Giordano
AP

A cancer patient is suing the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission for discrimination, claiming agency workers disregarded policy and insisted she remove the headscarf she wears to hide her chemotherapy induced hair loss, according to court documents filed Tuesday.

Jennifer Giordano, who has stage-two breast cancer went to the Eatontown MVC on June 14 to update her licence with a new address, and was confronted by an employee who she says humiliated her and caused her to burst into tears.

"I was practically begging her, 'please, please can you make an exception?'" Giordano, 40, told The Post of her conversation with the worker.

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The mom of three boys says that she always wears the head covering and wasn't comfortable taking it off in her home until a couple weeks ago.

"As a woman, when you remove your hair, to be stripped of that, it's almost like being naked and raw," Giordano said. "More importantly, it's a constant reminder that I have cancer and I could maybe die."

Giordano says her first question to MVC workers was, "do I have to take my scarf off?" and that she was told she did.

"I told her, 'I have breast cancer, I'm bald, I don't want to take it off,'" Giordano recalled. "I don't want to stand bald in front of a room of 40 people."

Still, the employee insisted and Giordano said she was shocked at the cold manner in which she was treated, adding that none of the other employees intervened and that the incident felt like "The Twilight Zone."

"I usually have a big mouth but in the moment I was so distraught, and broken and in shock that it was kind of a daze, like a fog," she said. "I was meek and weak and couldn't believe this was actually happening to me."

Finally another employee used her old photo to print the new license and the manager told her the MVC allows people who wear head coverings for medical or religious reasons to keep them on for new photos.

"Well, she clearly doesn't know that," Giordano said, pointing to the employee who caused her distress.

New Jersey state law also dictates that drivers whose appearance may be affected while undergoing medical treatment can renew their license using an old photo.

Giordano hopes her suit will push the agency to train employees on how to treat customers with medical or religious exemptions.

"It's not ok," she said. "Training needs to be implemented so that everyone is aware of the policy. Women, men- anyone who has cancer- doesn't deserve to be treated like this."

She also says this is her way to fight for herself and for others.

"I can't call up Governor Christie and say 'hey I'd like to talk to you about DMV employee training'... This is my way to have a voice and for me to fight."

One of Giordano's lawyers, Richard Schall says this case, "seems to be a systemic problem at the DMV," citing a similar incident from 2015 in which a Jersey woman with cancer was also told to remove her head covering.

MVC spokesperson Mairin Bellack said she could not comment on pending litigation.